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# A Survey of Audiences for Reading Assessment: One District's Needs and Methods of Assessment and Its Profile of a Good Reader

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A SURVEY OF AUDIENCES FOR  
READING ASSESSMENT:  
ONE DISTRICT'S NEEDS AND METHODS OF ASSESSMENT  
AND ITS PROFILE OF A GOOD READER

**THESIS**

Submitted to the Graduate Committee of the  
Department of Education and Human Development  
State University of New York  
College at Brockport  
in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Science in Education

by

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Brockport, New York  
July 1993

*Dedicated*

*to Bill, with Love*

*and gratitude, for his generous and whole-hearted support  
throughout the last nine years.*

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## ABSTRACT

Teachers and residents in one small school district were surveyed to determine their needs for reading assessments, the methods of assessment they thought would best meet those needs, and their opinions on what is needed in order to read well.

Results showed that both groups use assessment primarily to monitor student progress and to identify student strengths and weaknesses. Teachers also use assessments to plan instruction, strategies and activities.

The two methods of assessment that the majority of respondents thought would best meet their assessment needs were individual assessment of reading performance and daily observation with frequent anecdotal records.

Respondents cited 93 different criteria for reading well, with all but eight corresponding to factors cited by experts and researchers as influencing reading proficiency.

Results indicated agreement between the two groups across all three topics and implied a support for whole-language instruction and alternative, perhaps authentic, assessment.

## Table of Contents

	Page
Chapter I	
Statement of the Problem.....	1
Purpose.....	1
Questions to Be Answered.....	1
Need for the Study.....	1
Definition of Terms.....	4
Summary.....	4
Chapter II	
Review of the Literature.....	6
Purposes for Assessment.....	6
Methods of Assessment.....	9
Authentic Assessment.....	12
Profile of a Good Reader.....	20
The Questionnaire as Survey Technique.....	31
Chapter III	
Design of the Study.....	41
Purpose.....	41
Questions.....	41
Methodology.....	41
Analysis of Data.....	44
Summary.....	44

## Table of Contents (Cont'd.)

### Chapter IV

Results of the Study.....	46
Purposes for Assessment.....	46
Methods of Assessment.....	49
Comparison of Purposes with Methods.....	52
Characteristics of a Good Reader.....	56
Summary.....	60

### Chapter V

Conclusions and Implications.....	61
Conclusions.....	61
Assessment Purposes and Methods.....	61
Profile of a Good Reader.....	63
Limitations.....	66
Implications for Schools.....	66
Implications for Research.....	70

References.....	73
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### Appendix

Assessment Needs Questionnaire.....	80
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## Chapter I

### Statement of the Problem

#### Purpose

The purpose of this study was to determine one school district's needs for reading assessment, its preferred methods of meeting those needs, and its profile of a "good reader."

#### Questions

The study sought to answer the following questions for one school district:

1. What are the purposes of reading assessment?
2. What methods of reading assessment are favored?
3. What attitudes, skills and behaviors make up a "good reader?"

#### Need for the Study

Since the publication in 1983 of A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for School Reform, pressure has mounted for significant educational reform toward



producing students who can read, think, communicate, and solve problems.

Educational theories, approaches and instructional methods have undergone many different types of reform but evidence of the successes of these reforms often relies upon the same types of assessment used before reform. A need for assessment reform has been declared by "numerous commissions, study groups and forums" (Hansen & Hathaway, 1991, p. 1). A key finding of one such commission, the National Commission on Testing and Public Policy (NCTPP) was that "Current testing, predominantly multiple choice in format, is over-relied upon, lacks adequate public accountability, sometimes leads to unfairness in the allocation of opportunities, and too often undermines vital social policies (NCTPP, 1990, p. ix)" (Hansen & Hathaway, 1991, p. 1). The NCTPP study concluded that "to help promote greater development of the talents of all our people, alternative forms of assessment must be developed and more critically judged and used, so that testing and assessment open the gates of opportunity rather than close them off (p. x.)" (Hansen & Hathaway, 1991, p. 2).

The NCTPP included representatives of the

fields of education, business, law, labor, assessment and measurement, and manpower development and training.

Educational assessment is indeed important to many different groups of people. Each group receiving and using information from assessments can be considered an audience for assessment (Farr, 1992). Audiences include the general public, residents of a school district, parents, students, teachers, administrators and others with an interest in the academic achievement of students (Farr, 1992). A first step in developing alternative assessments is a thorough consideration of audience, purpose and the usefulness of current assessment practices (Afflerbach, 1993; Farr, 1992). Input from all audiences "contributes to a more balanced representation of values related to reading assessment and to [reports] that are more easily understood and useful" to more people (Afflerbach, 1993, p. 465).

At Mark Twain Elementary School in Colorado, committees of teachers and parents took their ideas and recommendations for assessment reforms "to the whole staff in a forum setting and held town meetings... [They] didn't go far in a committee without seeking input... Community support was considered essential for

the change effort to succeed" (Lockwood, 1991, p. 4).

This study provided a means of obtaining input as to assessment needs and practices from all the district's audiences for assessment and of opening a dialogue about readers, reading and reading assessment among those audiences.

#### Definitions of Terms

ASSESSMENT--in this study, assessment is defined as any measure of progress, skills and/or abilities.

INSTRUMENT--in this study the word instrument refers to any device designed to assess.

METHOD--in this study the word method refers to any procedure of assessment and may or may not include the use of instruments.

#### Summary

The several audiences for assessment information include parents and other district residents and school personnel. Each audience has its own particular need or use for assessments. In this study those audiences were surveyed to ascertain those needs as well as their views on how those needs might

best be met and a their profile of a "good reader."  
Data were tallied, categorized, and analyzed for  
implications for the district's assessment program.

## Chapter II

### Review of the Literature

Two aspects of assessment were considered in this review. First, the purposes of assessment were examined and are here shown to vary among the different audiences for assessment. Then the categories of assessment methods were reviewed and are here discussed according to what types of information may be gained about students from each. This methods section includes a review of the literature on authentic assessment.

Also related to this investigation are the concept of a "good reader" and the questionnaire as a survey technique. Literature on both topics is reviewed in this chapter.

#### Purposes for Assessment

Ultimately, educational assessment must serve the learner. It must provide to the learner, and to those involved in her education, information about growth, progress and strengths which can be used to guide improvement and further growth (Wiggins, 1990).

Those directly involved in a child's education are her teachers and parents. These adults know the student personally and are, to different degrees, aware of her strengths and progress. The information gained from assessments can be used by the teacher to justify decisions about a student regarding diagnosis, placement, grouping and grading (Hansen & Hathaway, 1991). Parents use assessment information about their own child to add to their knowledge of her strengths and growth, and perhaps, to aid in decisions regarding placement. These are the primary purposes of assessment for teachers and parents. Both have further purposes which will be discussed later.

For the primary purposes of parents, students and teachers, many types of assessments are useful: small- and large-scale, informal and formal, frequent and annual, individual and large-group, individualized and standardized. Different information is gained from each type and through them, these three audiences can increase their perceptions about the child as a learner (Mitchell & Stempel, 1991).

While the child, parent and teacher audiences can but benefit from the information from many different types of assessment, such a quantity of data

quickly becomes unwieldy for audiences who must consider the progress of large groups of children. These audiences include principals and other school administrators, school board members, the superintendent, the district's residents and its parents and teachers, as well as legislators, and funding institutions (Hansen & Hathaway, 1991).

To obtain manageable data about large groups of students, these audiences have traditionally relied upon large scale, formal, annual, standardized assessments. Such assessments provide numerical data that is easily and quickly analyzed and manipulated. The numbers are compared to norms, to previous years' scores and to scores of other districts. When scores are higher, progress is assumed to have been made (Farr, 1992).

Policy-makers use norm-referenced scores to determine the effectiveness of curriculum and whether mandated goals have been met (Hansen & Hathaway, 1991). Legislators and funding bodies use the numbers to determine accountability and allocation of funds (Mitchell & Stempel, 1991). Judgments about educational accountability and curriculum effectiveness are also made, based on these numbers, by school

administrators, teachers, parents and the general public. Teacher effectiveness is often determined by students' scores (Farr, 1992). Administrators and other faculty and staff have a further purpose for such numerical data, that of student sorting and selection for placement in remedial programs (Mitchell & Stempel, 1991). Students scoring below a predetermined level will automatically qualify for state-funded programs of remediation.

#### Methods of Assessment

"No single assessment can serve all the audiences in need of performance information" (Farr, 1992, p. 30). And no single method of assessment will provide the rich variety of data necessary to determine "how well a student has achieved desired learning outcomes... Effective classroom assessment requires multiple sources of data, gathered over time, regarding student learning to enable us to make sound inferences about what our students know and can do" (Ferrara & McTighe, 1992, p. 338).

In discussing multiple sources of data, Ferrara and McTighe (1992) used a framework of assessment approaches based on the work of the Maryland



Working Group on Assessing Thinking. The framework categorizes assessment by format: Selected Response, Constructed Response, Product, Performance and Process-Focused. "Organizing the five approaches in this way highlights the most important similarities of the methods in the same [category], and the most useful distinctions between the methods in different [categories]" (p. 339).

Within the framework, Ferrara and McTighe list 27 methods of assessment "intended to characterize each assessment approach, rather than exhaustively define it" (p. 340).

Selected Response formats are "among the most widely used classroom assessment methods" (p. 340). These are the multiple-choice, true/false and matching formats employed in standardized tests, tests in textbook packages, and many teacher-created tests. They are useful for determining whether students "recall and understand factual information" (p. 340).

Constructed Response formats require students to create an answer by filling a blank, labeling a diagram, writing a short answer, mapping a concept, drawing a picture, and showing work. Such tasks provide teachers "insights into how students organize

facts" (p. 341) and a measure of the "accuracy and complexity of their understanding" (p. 341).

Product Assessments include longer writing assignments and writing portfolios which show students' abilities to "locate and organize information and express ideas clearly" (p. 341) as well as projects and exhibitions in which students "demonstrate ability to apply knowledge and skills in authentic contexts" (p. 341).

Performance Assessments "allow teachers and others to directly observe the application of desired skills" (p. 341). Ferrara and McTighe cite as examples the performance of a musical piece, lab procedure, typing, sports competition and also debates and oral reports. As will later be shown, many other skills can be applied in performances as well.

Process-Focused Assessments help teachers learn "what knowledge, thinking skills and processes students apply in classroom learning situations" and to "assess the development of habits of mind such as persistence and openmindedness" (p. 341). Methods in this category include oral questioning and interviews, think-aloud tasks, learning logs, process folios and observation.

In choosing a format for assessment, Ferrara and McTighe agree with Farr (1992) that the first step is to determine the learning or exit outcomes desired, the purposes of the assessment, and the audiences for the results.

The next step, that of selecting or designing an assessment appropriate to the desired outcomes, to the purposes and to the audiences, is currently the subject of some research and much debate, criticism and commentary.

New forms of assessment are under development in many states, local school districts, colleges, universities, research centers and organizations... Old ideas and assumptions are being challenged, both from a curricular and a technical standpoint, all at a time when the learning needs of students have not been higher. (Roeber, 1992, p. 6)

#### Authentic Assessment

The new forms mentioned above by Edward Roeber, Director of Student Assessment Programs, Council of Chief State School Officers, are in response to calls from the National Commission on Testing and Public Policy (1990) for "alternative assessments" (p. x.) and from the National Academy of Education Commission on Reading (1985) for "more comprehensive assessments" (p. 101), as well as from many others of

the audiences for assessment (Farr, 1992).

The new forms are not so radically different that they don't fit into the framework above. In fact, the methods and tasks often retain the same labels. The differences lie in the shift of emphasis toward performance, product and process-focused assessments and in the far-reaching effects on those directly involved in assessments: teachers and students. The new forms are meant to have deep, personal meaning for the student, and to be worthwhile tasks that have, or closely simulate, real-world usefulness (Cronin, 1993; Farr, 1992; Hansen & Hathaway, 1991; Lockwood, 1991; Newmann & Wehlage, 1993; Schnitzer, 1993; Wiggins, 1990, 1992a, 1992b, 1992c).

Authentic assessment is defined by Archibald and Newmann (1988, in Hansen & Hathaway, 1991) as meeting three criteria: "1. production of discourse, things or performance; 2. flexible use of time; and 3. collaboration" (p. 2). Lockwood (1991) also quotes Archibald and Newmann, providing further explanation: "A valid assessment system provides information about the particular tasks on which students succeed or fail, but more important, it also presents tasks that are worthwhile, significant and meaningful-- in short,

authentic" (p. 1).

According to Grant Wiggins (1990), researcher and consultant on school reform issues and widely known advocate of authentic assessment, authenticity in assessment results from "worthy intellectual tasks...that mirror the priorities and challenges found in the best instructional activities [and] that involve 'ill-structured' challenges and roles that help students rehearse for the complex ambiguities of the 'game' of adult and professional life" (p. 1). Assessment is authentic when a direct examination of student performance "attends to whether the student can craft polished, thorough and justifiable answers, performances or products [and] requires students to be effective performers with acquired knowledge" (p. 1). Authentic assessment "achieves validity and reliability by emphasizing and standardizing the appropriate criteria for scoring such varied products" (p. 1).

This emphasis on performance has led to the use of the term 'performance assessment' (Farr, 1992; Mitchell, 1993; Wiggins, 1991, 1992a), which shifts attention away from the task toward the task outcome, confusing the issue. "If our aim is merely to monitor performance, then conventional testing is probably

adequate. If our aim is to improve performance across the board, then the tests must be composed of exemplary tasks, criteria and standards" (Wiggins, 1990, p. 2).

Assessment must ultimately serve the learner. Conventional testing serves the learner indirectly and externally, through alteration of curriculum and instructional strategies well after test results are analyzed, or, at best, the learner receives the teacher's judgment on his performance the day following the test. Conventional testing leaves the student last and least in the list of audiences for test results.

Authentic assessment considers students first, meeting students' needs for immediate feedback on their progress yet also providing useful information to teachers, parents, administrators, district officials and the general public (Paris et al., 1992; Wiggins, 1990). Discussion following focuses on the effects, benefits and uses of authentic assessment for each audience.

### Students

Students in authentic learning contexts are aware of the criteria by which their performance will be assessed and have exemplars readily available. This

in itself simulates the real world in which we judge our own and others' performance by those of experts or pros. "A 'standard,'" writes Wiggins (1992a), "is an exemplary performance serving as a benchmark. The music of Yo-Yo Ma and Wynton Marsalis each sets a standard for other musicians; the fiction of Tom Wolfe and Mark Twain each sets a standard for American writers" (p. 19). In the classroom, students have before them the work of their peers, their teachers, and older students as well as real world authors, artists, musicians, scientists, mathematicians, engineers, athletes, etc. The anxiousness of some students to know, "Is this right?" is reduced as they seek the answer from the standard rather than the teacher. In comparing their work with a standard, students become self-assessors, internalizing their strengths and weaknesses (Wiggins, 1992a). Authentic assessments "help students to engage in monitoring and evaluating their own work, to reflect on their efforts and accomplishments, and to gain insights into the processes of learning that will help them in future tasks" (Paris et al., 1992, p. 97).

Students become "more invested in their own learning since they are generating a sizable portion of

it. Student work is more meaningful in that it involves problem-solving, self assessment and transferability of skills to practical arenas outside the school" (Lockwood, 1991, p. 1). Authentic tasks "stimulate motivated learning by students" (Paris et al., 1992, p. 96), by "engaging [them] in using their minds well" (Newmann & Wehlage, 1993, p.8).

### Teachers

"Children learn best when they are actively involved... when they make choices and build on what they already know..." (Wiggins, 1992c, p. 40). Hansen (1992) found support for this statement and benefits to teachers as well, in her three years of research in a New Hampshire elementary school. Children as young as first grade were able to articulate to their teacher what they had learned, what they wanted to learn and how they planned to go about learning in their self-directed writing program. The teacher found the self-assessment conferences to be the "best conferences she'd had in 10 years of teaching... She said, 'Of all the things I've done... this was the most helpful" (p. 103).

While the students work on authentic tasks,



teachers are able to directly observe applications of skills, which provides "dynamic descriptions of students' rates of learning and degrees of change" (Paris et al., 1992, p. 96). Teachers find "increased communication with students and heightened command of individual content areas" (Lockwood, 1991, p. 1). In designing tasks, teachers design curriculum: "...the assessments are tied directly to curriculum objectives and to instructional procedures and goals in the classroom" (Paris et al., 1992, p. 97). Authentic tasks "are actually instructional activities in and of themselves so the class time they require is doubly well invested" (Farr, 1992, p. 35). When the task is authentic, then, not only is student learning increased, but instruction is also improved (Mitchell, 1991; Wiggins, 1990).

#### Parents and the Public

Data from authentic assessments can provide parents and community members with "understandable evidence concerning their students' performance; the quality of student work is more discernible to laypersons than when we must rely on translations of talk about stanines and renorming" (Wiggins, 1990, p.

2). "We believe that parents can become more involved in their children's literacy when they understand how they can support and extend instructional efforts at school" (Paris et al., 1992, p. 97). Such data can provide information about the curriculum objectives and instructional practices to the general public, too. Students, classrooms and programs can be compared and contrasted according to results of assessments on a single attribute or dimension, or according to percentages of students meeting some criterion (Paris et al., 1992).

#### Administrators and Other Officials

Authentic assessments can serve multiple functions when they are designed with these purposes in mind. They "can yield summative data for administrators who must provide quantitative indicators of accountability" (Paris et al., 1992, p. 97) and they can provide normative data, too, with careful structuring of scoring rubrics, collection of a broad range of anchors or exemplars, and inservice training for the raters (Farr, 1992). "Schooling we can be proud of and held genuinely accountable for demands more locally useful, authentic, and enticing

assessments" (Wiggins, 1992, p. 33).

### Profile of a Good Reader

Experts and researchers in reading continue to debate many aspects of reading instruction and learning theory such as methods, materials, areas of emphasis and rationale for each. In considering what a good reader is, has, does or needs, however, no disagreement was found in the literature. Experts and researchers have come to similar conclusions as to what reading is and which abilities, strategies, beliefs, attitudes and environments are necessary to reading well.

Most definitions of reading include a conception of it as a process of constructing meaning (Brown, 1982; Cunningham, 1990; Donoghue, 1985; Johnston, 1992; National Academy of Education Commission on Reading [NAECR], 1985; Smith & Covalt, 1991). The process is variously described as dynamic, complex, and holistic and integrated. The process is driven by cognitive skills (Smith & Covalt, 1991), requiring coordination and consideration of many factors or interrelated sources of information

(Donoghue, 1985; NAECR, 1985). It is a cognitive process reliant on and involving all brain processes (Taylor, Harris & Pearson, 1988) or it is seen as the product of such processes (Brown, 1982). Beginning readers who view reading as discovering meaning, tend to make progress in learning to read, even as adult beginners (Boracs & Schumacher, 1981).

Throughout the literature there is an emphasis on the interdependence of the variety of factors influencing reading proficiency. These factors, here discussed separately for clarity and organization include:

1. The home and school environments and attitudes of significant others in the reader's life.
2. Visual acuity and visual-motor skills.
3. Background knowledge.
4. Word recognition, word analysis, rate and fluency.
5. Comprehension strategies and metacognition.
6. Opportunity to practice reading.
7. Personal attributes, beliefs and efforts.
8. Motivation and attitude toward reading.
9. Reaction, personal involvement and

empathy.

10. Quantity and quality of books available.

11. Opportunity to write.

Reading begins at home, before children come to school. Elderly lifelong readers recalled an early interest in reading and that their mothers were influential as reading models (Duncan & Goggin, 1982). The NAECR (1985) found that children acquire knowledge, concepts, vocabulary and basic grammar of oral language at home, and that "parents expectations, home language and experience influence how well children read" (p. 22).

Robeck and Wiseman (1980) found that preschool, middle-class children already have a functional concept of the purpose of reading and writing, as well as developing concepts of linguistic terms and direction of print in books and on paper.

Good readers were often read to very early and taught informally about reading and writing by their parents (NAECR, 1985).

To become good readers, children need, in addition to effective reading instruction at school, a literate environment, stimulating and interesting

classrooms where reading and writing are a priority (NAECR, 1985).

The most basic requirements for gaining meaning from printed text are an ability to see the print with sufficient clarity to discriminate words and letters, and to guide vision across and down lines of print automatically (Brown, 1982; Rottman & Cross, 1990; Smith & Covalt; 1991).

Also automatic in the skilled reader is the recognition of words. "Due to practice and familiarity" (Brown, 1982, p. 13), the skilled reader makes a positive identification of a word "within 250 milliseconds, on average" (NAECR, 1985, p. 11). A simple indicator of reading ability is the number of words recognized instantly (Johnston, 1992).

Instant word recognition is essential in order for the reader to devote attention to interpreting the author's meaning (NAECR, 1985). Expert readers give less of their attention to recoding print to speech (Taylor, Harris & Pearson, 1988), automatically recognizing patterns in words (Johnston, 1992), decoding quickly and accurately so "that this process can coordinate fluidly with the process of constructing the meaning of the text (NAECR, 1985, p.

11).

Decoding is as fundamental a component of skilled reading as vision and eye movement (Rottman & Cross, 1990). Skilled readers decode new words by analogy with known words, seeking and recognizing familiar patterns in syllables (Boracs & Schumacher, 1981; Brown, 1982; Johnston, 1992; NAECR, 1985). Early phonics instruction is therefore "an essential ingredient" (NAECR, 1985, p. 36) in learning to read. "Children taught phonics get off to a better start" (NAECR, 1985, p. 37), as do adult beginning readers, who make better progress once "exposed to syllabication[and] manipulation of vowels" (Boracs & Schumacher, 1981, p. 1).

A good reader has a large sight vocabulary, which "implies a considerable amount of other knowledge" (Johnston, 1992, p. 179). Good readers skillfully integrate text information with their own knowledge (Routman, 1989), shifting emphasis from self to text and back to construct or produce meaning (NAECR, 1985; Peterson & Eeds, 1990; Taylor, Harris & Pearson, 1988). "No text is self-explanatory," making it "essential for children to learn to construct meaning based on background knowledge as well as

information in the text" (NAECR, 1985, pp. 9, 51).

Prior knowledge, then, is of critical importance to reading well (Narang, 1990; Rottman & Cross, 1990; Taylor, Harris & Pearson, 1988; Wollman-Bonilla, 1991). Knowledge and experiences of the world (Johnston, 1992) and of story elements (Rottman & Cross, 1990) allow good readers to fill in gaps in information and make inferences necessary to make sense of print (Rottman & Cross, 1990; Routman, 1989; Taylor, Harris & Pearson, 1988).

As Peterson and Eeds (1990) say, "Genuine meaning, meaning over which readers have ownership, arises only if readers are able to structure it themselves, through their own interpretations, in light of their experiences and intent" (p. 18).

Intent or purpose is an important consideration for the good reader. "Skilled readers are flexible" (NAECR, 1985, p. 13): They evaluate the reading task, construct a purpose for reading, then plan strategies and adjust reading speed and level of attention to match purpose (Narang, 1990; Reynolds, Shepard, Lapan, Kreek & Goetz, 1990; Rottman & Cross, 1990; Ruddell, 1991; Wagner, Spratt, Gal & Paris, 1989).



In evaluating the reading task, the good reader assesses her own knowledge to determine the complexity and familiarity of the text (NAECR, 1985). Such evaluation includes previewing the text, identifying the main idea, self-questioning and predicting (Narang, 1990; Wollman-Bonilla, 1991).

The critical processes of predicting, self-monitoring and self-correcting are at the "heart" of comprehension (Johnston, 1992, p. 181). The skilled reader is aware of the depth of her understanding of a text and knows what to do when she fails to comprehend (NAECR, 1985; Narang, 1990; Ruddell, 1991; Wagner et al., 1989). This awareness is known as metacognition. Baker and Brown (1984, in Ruddell, 1991) asserted that metacognitive acts "involve two separate components: (a) awareness of what skills, strategies and resources are needed to perform the task, and (b) ability to use the self-regulatory mechanisms of checking, planning, evaluating, testing, revising and remediating" (p. 10).

In remediating a failure to comprehend, effective readers employ such strategies as focusing attention (Reynolds et al., 1990), putting the problem on hold until further information is received, looking ahead, seeking expert help, suspending judgment,

forming tentative hypotheses, and re-reading the sentence or previous context (Donoghue, 1985; NAECR, 1985).

Rottman & Cross (1990) assert that it is "essential that students know about strategies and act on this knowledge" (p. 270) and studies show that good readers do. Wagner et al. (1989) found that "children with a more thorough understanding of metacognitive parameters tend to be the most effective readers" (p. 291). Reynolds et al. (1990) agree: "Successful readers are more metacognitively aware of how and when to use selective attention strategy and use significantly more conceptual attention while reading" (p. 749). "Better readers," found Rottman and Cross (1990) "are more aware and more likely to engage in strategic reading" (p. 271). Ruddell's study supports this: "High achievers know what the task is about and have well-developed, functional strategies for getting the job done" (p. 9). Wagner et al. (1989) put it succinctly: "Metacognition and reading performance are often correlated" (p. 283).

The importance of problem-solving strategies and comprehension is obvious to many non-researchers as well. Smith and Covalt (1991) surveyed adults'

perceptions of skills important for being a good reader at four different ages. "The most-cited skills were in the category of problem-solving and comprehension (29% of the total)... This pattern was consistent across all four target ages" (p. 6). Both the college students and non-faculty employees in this study knew, perhaps intuitively, what Donoghue (1985) and Brown (1982) point out to future teachers: that reading does not occur without comprehension.

The skills and strategies of metacognitive comprehension can be taught and learned (Boracs & Schumacher, 1981; Brown, 1982; NAECR, 1985; Rottman & Cross, 1990). Then, reading must be practiced to achieve automaticity in metacognition as well as in decoding and word recognition (Johnston, 1992). "Oral and silent reading is important for beginners," and also throughout life: "Reading is not mastered once and for all at a certain age, but continues to improve through practice" (NAECR, 1985, pp. 58, 16-17). Daily reading was found in Smith and Covalt's (1991) study to be an important skill for being a good reader at every age.

Practice requires time and effort. Wagner et al. (1989) noted that "good beginning readers tend to

take responsibility for their own learning and assume control through effort and diligence" (p. 291). This study found an increasing developmental relationship between children's beliefs in their effort and their success in reading.

What makes good readers devote time and effort to reading? The critical aspect of motivation (Johnston, 1992) which "most likely promotes the learning process" (Rottman & Cross, 1990, p. 277), requires seeing why reading is important and depends on the reader's level of enjoyment (Donoghue, 1985) and involvement (Johnston, 1992). Peterson and Eeds (1990) say that "all it takes for readers to have access to a story is a willingness to enter" (p. 15) but that once inside, "inquiry and critique are skills necessary for constructing meaning" (p. 21). Brown (1982) supports this, saying the good reader "must weigh words, evaluate, appreciate and enjoy;" testing the written information against personal knowledge and experience (p. 9). This reaction to text completes the reading process, according to Brown. Johnston (1992) agrees: "Part of a reader's responsibility is to respond" to text; "involvement is indicative of literate people" (pp. 173, 169). Adults considered good readers are

"active, voracious and like to talk about their reading" (Rasinski, 1989, p. 85). These readers are highly motivated. Notions of motivation, according to Johnston (1992) include the purpose for reading, whether significant others engage in reading and what kinds of reading they do. "This process [of motivation] will be conditioned by whether or not the person feels he is a good reader and by what criteria" (p. 172). Johnston implies motivation comes from within when he cites as an example "the binge reading of specific authors, which is typical of good young writers and readers, is something to be sought after and is not motivated by threats or requirements" (p. 172).

If children are to become good, motivated, daily readers, they must have enjoyable, successful experiences with books. Primers should be "interesting, comprehensible and instructive" (NAECR, 1985, p. 57). Textbooks should be "rich with important concepts and information" (NAECR, p. 81). Schools should "maintain well-stocked and managed libraries" (NAECR, p. 119).

And children should write. "Communicating ideas in writing is the vital connection between

learning to read and becoming an avid reader" (Decker, 1985, p. 1).

### The Questionnaire as Survey Technique

The methods by which data are collected depend on the kinds of data sought. Schoner and Uhl (1976) list six major types of information about people that are of interest to researchers: respondent's behavior, intentions, motivations, knowledge, socioeconomic and psychological traits, and attitudes and opinions. According to Tull and Hawkins (1976), the questionnaire can be used to measure these areas of interest.

The questionnaire is the most common form of measurement used in market research; it is "simply a formalized approach to asking someone for information" (Tull & Hawkins, 1976, p. 240). Questionnaires provide "primary research data" (Shepard Associates, Inc., 1990, p. 22), that is, data about a person directly from the person. The questionnaire is a communication method of research; questionnaires are used in each of the three principal types of this method: the personal interview, the telephone interview and the mail survey (Schoner & Uhl, 1976; Tull & Hawkins, 1976).

The choice of type of communication and design of the instrument should only be determined following consideration of many factors (Schoner & Uhl, 1976; Tull & Hawkins, 1976). To begin, the researcher needs a clear concept of the precise information needed (Shepard Associates, Inc., 1990; Tull & Hawkins, 1976). Then a decision must be made concerning from whom the information is needed. With this knowledge, the researcher may then consider how best to obtain the needed data from the target respondents (Tull & Hawkins).

The researcher must consider the costs, reliability, advantages and disadvantages of each form of communication in light of the particular data needed and respondents to be surveyed (Schoner & Uhl, 1976).

Personal Interview This is the oldest type of survey and is still widely used (Tull & Hawkins, 1976). The personal interview is costly but necessary if "the respondent must be probed at some length" (Schoner & Uhl, 1976, p. 8), or if visual cues are needed by the respondent, or if a high response rate is of great concern (Schoner & Uhl). The personal interview can be longer than a telephone interview and

requires less effort for the respondent than a mail survey.

The interviewer can be a "critical source of error", however, according to Tull and Hawkins (p. 271), especially if the questions are open-ended.

"Interviewers will vary in their ability to record the respondent's answers, in their intensity of probing, and in their objectivity... even when probing is expressly prohibited, the length of time the interviewer waits... before asking the next question can introduce biases that are hard to detect" (p. 271).

Telephone Interviews Telephone interviews are "ideal" when a "quick response is desired to questions that need not be considered at great length" (Schoner & Uhl, 1976, p. 8). They are less expensive than personal interviews and have become widespread as telephone ownership has increased (Tull & Hawkins, 1976).

The main disadvantages to telephone interviews are the absence of visual cues for the respondent and the "suspicious nature of phone calls and the ease of termination of the interview" (Tull & Hawkins, p. 380).

Mail Surveys Mail surveys are preferred



when a large, widely scattered sample must be reached (Schoner and Uhl). The may be delivered and returned through the mail, or dropped off and picked up by the researchers, or inserted in newspapers and magazines, or attached to products (Tull & Hawkins).

Mail surveys are appropriate to structured instruments containing visual cues or multiple-choice questions that respondents may have trouble remembering if presented verbally (Tull & Hawkins). Social motives, such as a desire to please the interviewer which may bias the personal and telephone interview, are almost entirely lacking in a mail survey. (Tull & Hawkins).

Mail surveys, though, are the least flexible of the three forms: "Questions must be presented in a fixed order [and] all respondents receive the same instructions [which] may increase standardization but may also increase confusion on the part of some respondents" (Tull & Hawkins, p. 379).

Confusion can be avoided by thoughtful design of the questionnaire, however it is to be administrated. A "sound questionnaire depends upon common sense, concern for the respondent, a clear

concept of the needed information and thorough pre-testing" (Tull & Hawkins, p. 241).

Of major importance in the construction of a questionnaire are the form and the sequence and content of the questions. (Schoner & Uhl; Tull & Hawkins).

Form, according to Schoner & Uhl, refers to *structure* and *disguise*. Structure is the "extent to which questions or observations and the alternative responses are specified" (p. 10). A structured instrument consists of a series of specific questions to which the respondent is restricted to a yes/no choice or to checking an appropriate item. A nonstructured instrument would involve topics to be discussed with the respondent and each succeeding question would be based on prior answers. Disguise refers to "whether the sponsor and the study purpose are identified to the respondent" (p. 10). In some cases it may be appropriate to disguise such information to prevent distortion of answers biased in favor of (or against) the sponsor.

The sequence of questions can affect the respondent's understanding of what information is sought, his willingness to respond, and even his ability to respond (Schoner & Uhl). Therefore, "the

first questions should be simple, objective and interesting" (Tull & Hawkins, p. 277), to get the respondent feeling comfortable and confident (Schoner & Uhl). More difficult and more personal questions should be near the end, for two reasons: first, having gone so far, the respondent is more likely to feel committed to completing the questionnaire, and any "suspicion or resentment caused by these questions" (Tull & Hawkins, p. 277) will have had no effect on preceding answers (Shepard Associates, Inc., 1990).

"The questions should move from topic to topic in a logical manner" (Tull & Hawkins, p. 277). Within topics, general questions should precede specific ones. The general questions help shape the frame of reference of the respondent for answering the specific questions (Tull & Hawkins). A logical flow of questions would help the respondent anticipate succeeding questions and "aid recall, thinking and... help to retain the respondent's cooperation" (Schoner & Uhl, p. 14).

The content of the questions themselves is of utmost importance. Indeed, the question is "the basic 'unit' of the communication method" (Schoner & Uhl, p. 7). Each question must be carefully formulated and

scrutinized to assure that respondents "will understand it, will be able to answer it accurately, and will be willing to answer it accurately" (Schoner and Uhl). In addition, the question must provide the precise information needed (Tull & Hawkins).

Tull and Hawkins recommend the following steps in creating effective questions.

1. Formulate the question and determine the need for it by asking, "Exactly how am I going to use the data generated by this question?" (p. 254). Unless the researcher has a precise answer, a definite role for the question, the question should be eliminated.

2. Decide whether the question is sufficient, or if perhaps two or more separate questions are needed to get at the specific data required.

3. Anticipate the respondent's ability to answer. A respondent may never have known the answer, or may have known it but forgotten, or may know the answer but be unable to articulate it. Examine the wording of the question. Make adjustments or add follow-up questions to help the respondent if necessary.

4. Assess the probability that the respondent will answer the question. The respondent may feel that

his answer is none-of-your-business, or embarrassing, or "reflects on his prestige" (p. 260). Again, the question wording can be adjusted to encourage response.

5. Consider the meaning of each word in the question. The question must be understandable to every respondent; the vocabulary level must match that of the target group and common words with multiple interpretations must be avoided. The words should be further examined for bias and must be free of "emotional color[ings] and suggest[ions] of approval or disapproval" (p. 266). The questions must also be free of any indication of the researcher's point of view. All facts or details relevant to the topic must be clearly stated, to avoid incorrect assumptions on the part of either the respondent or the researcher.

6. Determine the appropriate format for response. Open-ended questions free the respondent from influence by a given set of categories. They allow freedom of expression and "reduce potential frustration, particularly when mail surveys are used" (p. 270). They are especially suited to "exploratory and problem-identification research" (p. 270). However, open-ended questions may reveal more about a respondent's ability to express himself than about the

topic of researcher interest. "Most respondents will not write elaborate answers" (p. 270), thereby reducing the potential data. Open-ended questions for large surveys are impractical due to the time and cost of coding and categorizing responses and the difficulty of interpreting such data.

Multiple-choice questions are easier for respondents, reduce affects of inarticulateness and make tabulation and analysis much easier for the researcher. But the development of good multiple-choice questions requires "a considerable amount of effort" (p. 273), and data can be distorted by the respondent choosing an alternative he wouldn't have thought of on his own. There is also a tendency for respondents to choose the middle alternative of a range of numbers (salaries for example), the last alternative heard, and the first one read.

Dichotomous questions allow only one of two responses. They are quick and easy to ask, to answer and to code for analysis. However, dichotomous questions "are particularly susceptible to error caused by implied rather than stated alternatives" (p. 278), and by positive or negative manner of statement.

Once the questions are set, Tull and Hawkins strongly recommend giving the questionnaire a thorough pre-test. They suggest using respondents as similar as possible to the target group. These pre-test respondents should be interviewed after completing the questionnaire and asked to tell precisely why they responded to each question as they did.

## Chapter III

### Design of the Study

#### Purpose

The purpose of this investigation was to determine one district's needs for reading assessment, its preferred methods of meeting those needs, and its profile of a "good reader."

#### Questions

1. What are the purposes of reading assessment?
2. What methods of reading assessment are favored?
3. What attitudes, skills and behaviors make up a "good reader?"

#### Methodology

##### Instrument

The instrument used to gather the data was a questionnaire (see Appendix). The design of the questionnaire was based on the models and theory in Tull and Hawkins (1976) and Schoner and Uhl (1976).



For rationale and method of design, see Chapter II, Survey Techniques.

The questionnaire was designed to obtain the following information:

1. The respondent's role in the district, or assessment audience to which the respondent belonged;
2. The respondent's particular needs, uses or purposes for reading assessment;
3. The respondent's opinion as to the methods of assessment which would best meet his/her needs; and
4. The respondent's opinion as to what a person must be, have, and/or do in order to read well.

For the first three, the questionnaire provided multiple examples, plus, for the needs and methods, an "Other" category with space in which to specify. The fourth was open-ended with space in which to write a response.

### Subjects

The subjects of the investigation were residents, faculty and staff of a small, rural school district in Western New York State.

### Procedure

Responses to the questionnaire were requested in four ways:

Fifty were mailed, with stamped, self-addressed return envelopes, to district residents. The names and addresses were obtained from the district's census list of 1,954 by selecting every 38th to assure random representation of community members.

Twenty-seven were handed to faculty members following an oral presentation by the investigator at a faculty meeting.

Fifteen, with cover letters, were placed in the school mailboxes of faculty members absent from the previously mentioned faculty meeting.

Finally, cooperation was sought via phone conversation with the principal of the high school who agreed to distribute twenty-five questionnaires among his faculty. The questionnaires were sent to him through interdepartmental mail.

A total, then, of 127 responses were requested from district residents, teachers K-5 and 9-12, staff and administrators.

### Analysis of Data

Responses to the questions about needs and methods were tallied to obtain both an overall total for each need and method listed, and a total for each by assessment audience.

The responses to the question about characteristics of good readers were listed separately, with notations as to role of respondent, then analyzed for similarities. Similar responses were grouped together. These groups were then further analyzed to determine agreement across audience type. Finally, these responses were analyzed and compared to responses to the needs and methods questions to determine implications for reading instruction and assessment.

### Summary

The purpose of the investigation was to gather data from the residents, faculty and staff of one small, rural district to ascertain the district's needs for and preferred methods of reading assessment, and to compile a profile of a good reader for the district.

The data were obtained by questionnaire, of

which 127 were mailed or distributed. Responses were tallied and categorized by respondents' roles in the district and analyzed for similarities and agreement within and across roles.

## Chapter IV

### Results of the Study

The purpose of this investigation was to determine one school district's purposes for reading assessments, its preferred methods of meeting those needs, and its profile of a good reader.

The data were obtained by use of a questionnaire (see Appendix), mailed or delivered to district residents and faculty members. A total of 28 respondents provided complete questionnaires: 18 teachers, 8 parents and 2 who indicated they were "Other Community Members." Due to the smallness of this last group, it was combined with the parent group for a new group of 10 residents.

### Purposes for Assessment

The first question asked about the respondent's needs or purposes for reading assessments and provided six alternatives plus "Other." Respondents could check more than one. Table 1 shows the tabulation and percentages of each group and of the

total respondents who indicated each purpose for reading assessment.

Table 1  
Purposes for Assessment

Purpose	Number of Teachers	Percent of Teachers	Number of Residents	Percent of Residents	Number of Total	Percent of Total
A	3	17%	2	20%	5	17.8%
B	3	17%	5	50%	7	25%
C	17	94%	5	50%	22	78.5%
D	16	89%	3	30%	19	67.8%
E	17	94%	6	60%	23	82%
F	10	56%	2	20%	12	42.8%

KEY TO PURPOSES:

A = to judge effectiveness and accountability of the district as a whole

B = to judge effectiveness of curriculum, materials and teachers

C = to monitor the progress of individual students

D = to plan instruction, strategies and activities

E = to identify a student's strengths and weaknesses

F = to determine a student's qualification for placement in special programs

Identifying student strengths and weaknesses is a purpose for reading assessment for the majority of both groups: 94% of teachers; 60% of residents; 82% of total respondents.

Seventy-nine percent of total respondents also use reading assessments to monitor student progress.

Fifty percent of residents, but only 17% of teachers, use reading assessments to judge the effectiveness of curriculum, materials and teachers.

Eighty-nine percent of teachers, but only 30% of residents use reading assessments to plan instruction, strategies and activities.

Fifty-six percent of teachers and 20% of residents use reading assessments to determine a student's qualification for placement in special programs.

A relatively low percentage of both groups use reading assessment to judge the effectiveness and accountability of the district as a whole: 20% of residents; 17% of teachers; 18% of total respondents.

### Methods of Assessment

The second question asked which methods of reading assessment would best meet the respondent's needs . Again, a list of alternatives (eight) plus "Other" was provided. The respondent could check more than one. Table 2 shows the tabulation and percentages of each group and of the total respondents who indicated each method.



Table 2  
Methods of Assessment

Method	Number of Teachers	Percent of Teachers	Number of Residents	Percent of Residents	Number of Total	Percent of Total
1	8	44%	3	30%	11	40%
2	2	11%	0	0%	2	7%
3	7	39%	2	20%	9	32%
4	7	39%	1	10%	8	29%
5	16	89%	7	70%	23	82%
6	13	72%	7	70%	20	71%
7	11	61%	3	30%	14	50%
8	6	33%	1	10%	7	25%
9	1	6%	0	0%	1	4%

KEY TO METHODS:

- 1 = Standardized tests
- 2 = Textbook publisher-created, paper-and-pencil tests
- 3 = Published reading diagnostic tests
- 4 = Teacher-created, paper-and-pencil tests
- 5 = Periodic individual assessment of reading performance by teacher
- 6 = Daily teacher observation with frequent notations
- 7 = A collection of student work and comments in connection with reading
- 8 = Student self-evaluations
- 9 = Other

Periodic individual assessment of reading performance by the teacher using checklists and/or written comments was deemed by both groups to best meet their assessment needs. Eighty-nine percent of teachers and 70% of residents indicated this, for a total of 82% of respondents.

Seventy percent of residents and 72% of teachers indicated that daily teacher observation with frequent notations on skills and progress would also meet their needs for reading assessment.

Sixty-one percent of teachers and 30% of residents showed that a collection of student work and comments in connection with reading would meet their needs.

Forty-four percent of teachers and 30% of residents thought that standardized tests would meet their reading assessment needs.

Published diagnostic reading tests and teacher-created paper-and-pencil tests would both meet the reading assessment needs of 39% of teachers. Residents indicated published diagnostic tests (20%) over teacher-created tests (10%).

Thirty-three percent of teachers and just 10% of residents believe student self-evaluations would

meet their needs.

Only 11% of teachers and no residents felt that published textbook paper-and-pencil tests would meet their needs.

One teacher indicated "Other," writing in, "Some type of normed test would be helpful in order to compare a student's abilities with 'typical' students of the same age." This teacher had checked standardized tests, but had then crossed it out.

#### A Comparison of Purposes with Methods

The following discussion compares responses to Question 1 with responses to Question 2. It should be remembered that respondents could and did choose more than one response to each question. Table 3 compares teachers' purposes for reading assessments with their preferred methods of assessment. It shows again the number of teachers indicating each purpose, and then shows how many of that number preferred each method. For example, 17 teachers indicated "monitoring student progress" as a purpose for reading assessment; 16 of those 17, or 94%, also indicated that "periodic individual assessment" would best meet their needs.

Table 3  
Teachers' Responses about Their Needs for Assessment Compared with  
their Responses about Which Methods Best Meet Those Needs

Teachers indicating each purpose...		... the percentage of those choosing each method								
		M e t h o d s								
Purpose	Number	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
A	3	67%	0%	0%	67%	100%	100%	67%	0%	33%
B	3	67%	0%	33%	67%	100%	66%	67%	0%	33%
C	17	41%	6%	41%	41%	94%	76%	65%	29%	6%
D	16	38%	13%	41%	44%	88%	69%	63%	31%	6%
E	17	41%	6%	41%	41%	94%	76%	65%	29%	6%
F	10	40%	10%	40%	30%	90%	80%	70%	20%	10%

KEY TO PURPOSES:

- A = to judge effectiveness and  
accountability of district
- B = to judge effectiveness of  
curriculum, materials and  
teachers
- C = to monitor progress of  
individual students
- D = to plan instruction, strategies  
and activities
- E = to identify student's strengths  
and weaknesses
- F = to determine placement in  
special programs

KEY TO METHODS:

- 1 = Standardized tests
- 2 = Textbook-publisher tests
- 3 = Published diagnostic tests
- 4 = Teacher-created tests
- 5 = Periodic individual assessment  
of reading performance
- 6 = Daily teacher observation with  
frequent notations
- 7 = A collection of student work  
and comments
- 8 = Student self-evaluations
- 9 = Other

Of the 17 teachers (94%) who use reading assessments to monitor student progress, 16 of them thought periodic individual assessment of reading performance would best meet their needs.

The same number (17) also use reading assessment to identify a student's strengths and weaknesses. Of those, 16 also thought periodic reading assessment would best meet their needs.

Sixteen teachers (89%) use reading assessment to plan instruction, strategies and activities. Of those 16, 14 thought a method that would best meet their needs was periodic individual assessment.

Table 4 shows the number of residents choosing each purpose who also chose each method.

Table 4  
Residents' Responses about Their Needs for Assessment Compared with  
Their Responses About Which Methods Best Meet Those Needs

Residents indicating each purpose...			... the percentage of those choosing each method								
			M e t h o d s								
Purpose	Number		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
A	2		100%	0%	0%	0%	50%	50%	0%	0%	0%
B	5		60%	0%	40%	0%	60%	60%	0%	0%	0%
C	5		0%	0%	40%	0%	60%	100%	40%	20%	0%
D	3		0%	0%	33%	33%	67%	100%	100%	33%	0%
E	6		17%	0%	33%	0%	83%	67%	33%	17%	0%
F	2		50%	0%	50%	0%	100%	50%	0%	0%	0%

KEY TO PURPOSES:

A = to judge effectiveness and accountability of district

B = to judge effectiveness of curriculum, materials and teachers

C = to monitor progress of individual students

D = to plan instruction, strategies and activities

E = to identify student's strengths and weaknesses

F = to determine placement in special programs

KEY TO METHODS:

1 = Standardized tests

2 = Textbook-publisher tests

3 = Published diagnostic tests

4 = Teacher-created tests

5 = Periodic individual assessment of reading performance

6 = Daily teacher observation

7 = A collection of student reading work and comments

8 = Student self-evaluations

9 = Other

Six residents, 60%, indicated identifying student strengths and weaknesses as their purpose for reading assessment. Of those 6, 5 thought periodic individual assessment would best their needs.

Monitoring student progress is a purpose for reading assessment for 5 residents. All 5 of those residents think daily teacher observation with frequent notation would meet their needs.

No resident thought textbook package tests would meet their needs for reading assessment. Only one resident thought needs for planning instruction, strategies and activities would be met by teacher-created paper-and-pencil tests.

#### Characteristics of a Good Reader

The third question was open-ended (free response) and asked the respondent what a person must be, have, and/or do in order to read well. Table 5 shows factors contributing to good reading and, in total and by group, the number of criteria cited for each, as well as the number of respondents who mentioned criteria relating to each factor.

Table 5  
Factors Contributing to Reading Well

Factor	Citations per Factor			Respondents per Factor		
	Total	By Residents	By Teachers	Total	Residents	Teachers
Environment	14	9	5	9	5	4
Prior Knowledge	7	0	7	7	0	4
Word Recognition/ analysis	13	3	10	9	2	7
Comprehension	15	3	12	12	3	7
Practice	11	7	4	8	4	9
Motivation/ Attitude	13	4	9	8	2	4
Beliefs/ Effort	4	2	2	3	1	6
Reaction/ Involvement	4	0	4	3	0	2
Books	2	1	1	2	1	1
Writing	2	0	2	2	0	2
Other	7	3	4	6	2	4



Respondents listed a total of 93 different criteria for reading well. Of those 93, all but 8 were readily recognized as constituting one of the eleven factors influencing reading proficiency revealed in the literature reviewed in Chapter II (see pp. 23-24).

This was an open-ended question with five, full-width lines for free response. Teachers listed an average of 3.33 different criteria each, in an average of 2.72 different factor categories. Residents also listed an average of 3.33 different criteria each, in an average of 2 different factor categories.

The factor mentioned most frequently (16% of all criteria listed) was comprehension. Residents (parents) cited ability to comprehend; teachers mentioned applying multiple comprehension strategies and, more specifically, critical thinking skills, monitoring comprehension, and knowing how to read differently for different purposes.

More respondents (43%) listed criteria related to comprehension than to any other factor category.

The next most important criteria, with 14 citations (15% of total) by 32% of the respondents is

the home and school environment. This factor included such criteria as being read to, having encouragement from adults, being given books early, having reading in the home and role models for reading, having an interesting, exciting reading program at school with a teacher who is excited about it, too, and exposure to all types of literature in all its forms: books, plays, music and films.

The third most mentioned factors were motivation/attitude and word recognition/word analysis. Each totaled 13 citations (14% of all); the former cited by 32% of the respondents, the latter by 29%. Those whose answers fit the motivation/attitude category cited such criteria as a love of reading, a love of learning, a desire to read, a desire to learn and better oneself, becoming motivated by experiences with reading, having reading problems detected early to prevent discouragement, seeing a connection between reading and success, showing interest and enthusiasm, and knowing that "from reading, the world is [yours]."

In the word recognition/word analysis category, decoding was mentioned four times, sight words or sight vocabulary three times, phonics three times, ability to spell twice, and word attack, word

analysis, and proper pronunciation once each.

A sizable proportion (12%) of the total criteria listed had to do with practicing reading. Some respondents put simply "read;" others wrote about the importance of reading often, frequently, daily, or constantly. Two mentioned reading anything of interest; one advised, "experience what reading can do for you."

Six respondents cited criteria that didn't match any factor from the literature. These responses made up 7.6% of the total and were these: better facilities, rest, proper eating, possession of basic intellectual endowment, prioritization of what's important in life, skimming and scanning skills, and a need to read.

#### Summary

Analysis of the data revealed that teachers and residents often have the same needs for reading assessments, and often cite the same methods of assessment as best for meeting those needs. Teachers and residents together cited the same criteria for reading well as did experts and researchers.

## Chapter V

### Conclusions and Implications

#### Conclusions

##### Assessment Purposes and Methods

All audiences for assessment are, in theory at least, concerned with the instruction and progress of the learner. Each audience has some influence or other on instruction or students or both, from parents in the home, to teachers in the classroom, all the way to the head of the State Department of Education.

The audiences surveyed for this study use assessment to monitor student progress and to identify student strengths and weaknesses. The majority of teachers also use assessment to plan instruction, strategies and activities. This implies that these teachers plan and/or modify instruction based on student needs as indicated by assessment results. This further implies that the true aim of assessment is to improve student learning.

If, indeed, the purpose of assessment is to

improve, and not just to monitor, student learning, then the method of assessment takes on greater importance. Student learning from assessment is greatly influenced by two factors: the timing and quality of feedback, and the value placed on the task by the learner (Wiggins, 1992b). The method dictates these two factors.

Standardized testing offers the least, if any, opportunity for timely, useful feedback to the student about his performance. In addition, the format is often so different from day-to-day learning activities that the student may be, at best, confused about the value of the task.

Paper-and-pencil tests scored by the teacher may be returned to the student the very next day, with a grade and, perhaps, a brief comment. The usual procedure is for the teacher to grade all the tests at once and to return them all at once, making unlikely any opportunity for personal contact and the meaningful, helpful comments the student might receive in an individual conference.

Daily observation and individual assessment of performance, however, both provide at least the potential for rich, personal, immediate feedback on a

task of some value to the student. As the teacher observes the student, in either method, she has the opportunity to both praise and assist the learner in his application of skills as he applies them. She has the opportunity to seize the "teachable moment"-- that moment of uncertainty when, on a conventional test, the learner would choose, guess at or make up the "wrong answer."

The overwhelming majority of both audiences surveyed chose these latter two methods as those which would best meet their needs for monitoring student progress and identifying strengths and weaknesses. One may conclude then, that people in this district are aware not only that, as Wiggins (1991) said, assessment must serve the learner, but also which methods of assessment serve the learner best.

#### Profile of A Good Reader

The teachers, parents and residents surveyed for this study together listed the full range of criteria for reading well as was found in the literature of experts and researchers in the field.

Specifically, and in order of number of citations most to least, a Good Reader is someone who:

1. uses multiple strategies and critical thinking to comprehend text and to monitor comprehension;

2. has had the benefit of literate environments, with reading role models and a variety of materials available, and encouragement from adults at home and at school;

3. has or is building a broad sight vocabulary and is able to decode or analyze unfamiliar words;

4. loves reading and learning, is interested and enthusiastic about learning through books;

5. reads a lot, and has opportunity to choose material of interest;

6. has had a variety of experiences, building a broad knowledge base upon which to build new knowledge through reading;

7. is willing to work, to do the best possible; knows reading is an opportunity to learn; knows it to be enjoyable and worthwhile; and has an imagination;

8. applies what is read to life; questions, evaluates and discusses text and ideas;

9. has opportunities to write about what is

read, and can express own ideas in writing.

It was stressed in the literature that these criteria are interrelated and interdependent. An examination of the profile will reveal that, in fostering the development of a Good Reader, the home and the school are interrelated and interdependent as well. Both must provide literate environments; all adults in the learner's life must model and encourage reading; both parents and teachers must provide a variety of literature and experiences; both must provide opportunities for literary discussion, application and writing. The teachers still have the responsibility to teach decoding, analysis and comprehension skills and strategies, but the parents have the obligation to help the learner apply and practice these. Similarly, the parents have the responsibility to read to their children from infancy and provide literature and experiences, while the teachers have the obligation to help the learner build new knowledge upon the foundation laid by the parents.

There is not one criterion that is in the sole charge of either parent or teacher. Only by working together, combining efforts, resources and



ideas in mutual support of the work of the other, only in this way, will we help our children to become Good Readers.

### Limitations

It must be remembered that these conclusions and implications are based on data from a very small number of respondents. The eighteen teachers, eight parents and two community members may not be representative of their groups in the district or of those groups in general. The study was also very much limited by the lack of respondents among other audiences for assessment.

### Implications for Schools

The most important finding of this study, in the researcher's opinion, is the great degree to which teachers and residents agree. The two groups have much in common, in their uses for assessment, preferred methods of assessment and in what they believe is needed to read well.

This agreement can provide an excellent foundation for future cooperation and mutual support. It's a comfortable point from which to begin

discussions about improving both assessment and reading programs. It strengthens the partnership between home and school, from which benefits to children can be unlimited.

Parents and teachers, as those most directly involved in children's education, and as the largest groups in any school district, have a lot of clout. Knowing their purposes for assessment and their preference for alternative assessment methods, teachers and parents should work together and support each other in an investigation of other individual assessment methods and authentic tasks, such as portfolios and other performances and exhibitions of skills, strategies and processes across the curriculum.

Both groups need to be involved in any decisions regarding changes in or formulation of assessment and/or reading programs. Both groups need to be informed about implementation and effects on instruction and learning. Policymakers approached by both groups together will be much more likely to listen to and grant requests for costly consultant services and inservice than if approached by one group alone.

Showing policymakers that both groups value teacher observations for both formal and informal

assessment of reading should, at least, spark investigation of ways to make use of teachers' anecdotal records and narrative reports to inform all audiences about student performance. The findings of this study should serve to increase validation of teachers' perceptions and insights into student learning.

As teachers' assessments are more widely validated, reliance on such methods of assessment as standardized tests and textbook package tests should wane. Provided inservice is thorough, this will create more opportunities for student assessment tasks to be rich, meaningful and worthwhile for the student, requiring and revealing learning that is deeper and more complex than "objective" tests ever can.

And, as was found in the literature and indicated by the survey results, reading is a very complex "task," a process requiring a synthesis of several interrelated, interdependent tasks. This synthesis must be so well coordinated as to be automatic for the reader, and is therefore deep and difficult for an observer to assess. This difficulty is, of course, what inspired testing of discrete skills as a measure of reading ability, but educators have

finally admitted that performance of such isolated skills as pronouncing non-words is not indicative of real reading.

Real reading, the complex cognitive process, can be assessed, and also developed, through tasks requiring the learner to respond, react to, and discuss what was read; to apply knowledge gained, to perform, to portray a character or theme. Such tasks call for interpretation of text. Interpretation, justified by the text and prior knowledge, is only possible when real reading has taken place. During a learner's process of interpretation, the teacher, through observation and questioning, can literally 'dis-cover' where and why an interpretation is faulty. At the moment of such discovery, the teacher can redirect the learner to the text and teach appropriate comprehension strategies. Thus, teaching occurs at the moment of the student's need to learn, while he is actively involved in the task.

The implication from the results of this small study is pretty big: Teachers and residents (parents) in this district are already primed for an introduction to authentic assessment, though there has been little official discussion about it among the

faculty, and no word or direction from the school board or superintendent. Schools should be aware that the shift toward authentic assessment may be a grass-roots movement much as was the whole-language movement which it complements so well.

#### Implications for Research

First and foremost, this study should be replicated on a much larger scale to assure inclusion of all audiences for assessment. In addition, the respondents should be asked to give reasons for their selections of methods and perhaps restricted to the selection of one best method and one most important purpose.

Further research is needed on authentic assessment for all audiences to be persuaded of its benefits to learners. At this time, the area is new and the body of documentation of improvements in instruction and learning is small. This research should include: (a) a study of assessment methods to provide teachers with a selection of proven methods for assessing specific abilities and knowledge; and (b) a study further exploring methods that would provide an authentic task to learners and also would yield results

useful to audiences concerned with large groups of students. Locally, a district-wide survey of all audiences' interest in, knowledge of and current use of authentic assessment should be made prior to any commitment to implementation.

A survey of good readers and their opinions on what influenced or caused them to become good readers would be helpful to schools interested in designing authentic reading tasks and literate environments.

The research on reading is plentiful, but not widely enough publicized. Researchers should make certain that their findings get into the hands and minds of those who need and can make use of it. For example, every parent needs to be aware of the importance of the parent's role in the development of a good reader; every teacher needs to be aware of the importance of direct instruction in phonic awareness and metacognition. Until these findings are known to all, there will be children whose teachers and parents blame each other for poor reading performance.

Only when all involved are equally informed are balanced discussion, cooperation and compromise possible. This study has shown that in one small

district, there is already a foundation of agreement laid. This district is ready to move toward a future bright with good readers, through authentic learning, instruction and assessment.

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## APPENDIX

## ASSESSMENT NEEDS QUESTIONNAIRE

Please indicate your role in the school district by circling one:

Parent	Student	Teacher	Other Faculty Member
Staff Member	Administrator	Board Member	Other Community Member

**1. What are your needs regarding the assessment or evaluation of our students' reading progress? In other words, What, for you, is the main purpose of reading measures? Please check only those that apply to you alone.**

\_\_\_\_\_ to judge effectiveness and accountability of the district as a whole

\_\_\_\_\_ to judge effectiveness of curriculum, materials and teachers

\_\_\_\_\_ to monitor the progress of individual students

\_\_\_\_\_ to plan instruction, strategies and activities

\_\_\_\_\_ to identify a student's strengths and weaknesses

\_\_\_\_\_ to determine a student's qualification for placement in special programs

\_\_\_\_\_ other (please specify)

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**The questionnaire is continued on the back.**

## ASSESSMENT NEEDS QUESTIONNAIRE

**2. What types of assessment instruments or methods do you think would best meet your needs? You may check more than one.**

- ☐ Standardized tests (such as the New York State Pupil Evaluation Program, or PEP, tests and the CAT, or California Achievement Test)
- ☐ Textbook publisher-created, paper-and-pencil tests
- ☐ Published reading diagnostic tests (usually designed to diagnose an individual's reading problems)
- ☐ Teacher-created paper-and-pencil tests (may be multiple-choice, matching, essay, etc.)
- ☐ Periodic individual assessment of reading performance by teacher (records kept may include checklists of skills and/or written comments)
- ☐ Daily teacher observation with frequent notations as to behaviors which indicate reading skills and progress
- ☐ A collection of student work and comments in connection with reading
- ☐ Student self-evaluations of reading participation, enjoyment, strengths and weaknesses
- ☐ Other (please specify)

**3. It is the goal of every school district to have literate students and graduates; people who not only can read, but do read and read well. In your opinion, what must a person be, have and/or do in order to read well?**

**Thank you for your consideration!**